

Noel Selman

Noel Selman was born in about 1913. He gained his Leaving Certificate in 1931 from Sydney Technical High School.

In October 1932 he took up a Fitting and Turning apprenticeship with Australian Gaslight Company at Mortlake, with a first year wage of one pound five shillings and six pence. Living at Brighton-le-Sands meant leaving home at 5 am for tram to Rockdale, train to Central, train to Burwood then tram to be at Mortlake at 7.30 am. Father bought him second hand motor cycle.

After 3 months probationary apprenticeship, he enrolled in Mechanical Engineering Diploma at Sydney Technical College. One year after completing his apprenticeship, he joined Wunderlich as Draftsman. After gaining his Diploma, Selman studied subjects in Electrical Engineering and Local Government (Civil) Engineering Diplomas. He gained his Masters Degree in the Science of Engineering at University of Michigan in 1939 under Prof. Timoshenko.

At age 26 he became Chief Engineer of Wunderlich. His Initial project was the design and construction of new asbestos cement products plant at Rosehill.

After a time he left Wunderlich, joined CSR and was sent to Harwood Mill on the Clarence River. He spent 5 years as a sugar mill investigating engineer during much of the crushing seasons at mills in NSW, Queensland and Fiji. Made numerous improvements in mill efficiency such as Boiler Station Efficiency, Multiple Evaporator Efficiency, Pneumatic Conveying of Bagasse and Sugar Mill Steam Balance.

In 1946 at age 32, became Inspecting Engineer (Electrical) for Australian Mills. In 1955 he was sent to Staff Administration College at Henley-on-Thames for three months and on his return became Inspecting Engineer for Fiji Mills.

1958 accompanied Chief General Manager Australian Mills to Caribbean to survey cane growing and harvesting, developments in mechanical harvesting and loading, transport and general administration and detailed survey of engineering matters. Report regarded by GM as blueprint for next ten years for CSR mills.

In 1959 appointed Chief Mill Engineer - responsible for engineering operating budgets (both slack and operating seasons), proposals for major reconstruction and expansion of mills and engineering staff changes and promotions. He was also appointed joint Manager with Chief Mill Chemist of newly formed Mill Development Section.

To better control expenditure, Selman introduced "commitment accounting" into CSR and later the Mt Newman iron ore project.

In May 1963 the Townsville Bulk Sugar Terminal was gutted by fire - burnt for five days. Selman arranged installation of water pipeline to fight fire and then to bring terminal back into operation, including re-processing of 20 000 tons of wet sticky raw sugar containing pieces of steel, nuts and bolts, concrete etc. Terminal sufficiently rehabilitated to begin receiving sugar within four weeks of fire - soon after start of crushing season. Reconstruction kept ahead of sugar pile as it built up.

Another of his projects was the upgrading and expansion of the cane transport system. This involved upgrading of tracks - rails, sleepers and hundreds of bridges; replacement of steam locos with diesel; and introduction of radio control.

For the Western Australia Government, Selman undertook an investigation of the potential for a sugar industry on the Ord River. This showed that whilst the cane growing and sugar potential were high, the economics were uncompetitive due to high cost of labour in remote area.

Later he was Involved in determining feasibility of the Mt Newman - Deepdale Iron Ore Project and was appointed Deputy General Manager during two year construction period, with an extension to include commissioning. It was one of the largest privately sponsored, industrial projects ever undertaken in the world at the time. Mt Whaleback, the main ore body contains 1000 million tons of high grade haematite ore (averaging better than 64% iron) and is low in impurities.

Selman produced a paper on the project in about 1972:

- Project involved mine development, 265 mile standard gauge railway, a port and a township.
- Agreement with Western Australian Government signed on 10.4.67 and first shipload of ore sailed from Port Hedland on 1.4.69.
- At the time of Selman's paper, up to 12 trains travelled the return journey from the mine to Port Hedland each day. Each train comprised 135 cars and three locomotives totalling almost one mile in length, transporting 12 000 tons of ore. The trains are loaded five cars at a time.

At end of 1969 Selman returned to CSR as General Manager Pacminex - CSR's minerals and exploration company.

In 1972 he was appointed one of eight Senior Executive Officers (SEOs) to work closely with top Management in running CSR. Each year the General Manager Gordon Jackson had the top management team (including SEOs) spend a week debating the strengths and weaknesses of the Company and planning future strategies.

He retired from CSR in February 1977, when Gordon Jackson commented:

"The investment decisions made on his advice proved to be soundly based. Noel's name, attached to an estimate of a major project, is in good standing, not only in CSR, but with BHP, with major American mining companies and with major banks."

On retirement, he undertook management consulting until 1982.

Appointed as Part-time Member of Higher Education Board in 1981 replacing Bryan Kelman and to the Board's Finance Committee. Retired from Board in 1985 at stipulated retiring age of 70, but continued on Recurrent Funding Committee until Board disbanded in 1987.

The things Mr Selman cherishes most is never having been associated with shoddy engineering. All his projects were soundly engineered and effectively did what they were supposed to - without seriously exceeding approved estimates.

His significant contributions include his:

- development of young engineers and apprentices
- facilitation of design engineers visiting the site and getting a "feel" for the job they were engaged on;
- ability to present complex technical matters to non engineers and management; and
- introduction of commitment accounting, engineering auditing, disciplined estimating, the rational application of contingency sums and the sanctity of the project budget.